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ABSTRACT

The Deaf Parent to Hearing Parent project was developed to utilize the resources of the Deaf community to support the knowledge, skills, and networks of hearing parents raising deaf children. First, six deaf parents of deaf children met for focus group sessions to brainstorm the knowledge, strategies, and skills they had gained from personal parenting experience. Following this a group of deaf parents received volunteer training which focused on: research on deafness, communication methods, theories on teaching reading, and facilitation skills. The training meetings also looked at the perspectives of hearing parents who find out they have a deaf child and the process of mourning that such parents experience. The deaf parents then developed four family-focused workshops for hearing parents. This program uses local community sites and the resources of the Deaf community. Initial evaluation suggests a positive response by hearing parents. Pairing of a hearing parent with a deaf parent mentor is also planned. Contains 19 references. (DB)

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Communicating Across Cultures: The Deaf Parent to Hearing Parent Project

Paper Presentation
as part of
Symposium:
New Views of Home-School Partnership: Parents as Consultants

American Educational Research Association
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Communicating Across Cultures:
The Deaf Parent to Hearing Parent Project[1]

Introduction

Educators everywhere will tell you that "parents are their child's first teacher" and that in order for education to be effective, families must be involved in education (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Yet, the approach to family-school relations is usually uni-directional rather than reciprocal, with the flow of relations from school to community and the intent to improve families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

Whether schools are trying to recruit more parent volunteers, request support for homework, achieve a good turn-out on open house night, or enlist parents as members of local school councils, the focus is on the needs and practices of schools. The model of learning is one in which knowledge is transmitted from teachers to children, and from the schools to parents to children (Auerbach, 1989). Furthermore, the assumption is that school personnel have all the knowledge on teaching and learning (Moll, 1992). The focus on the value of schools for communities and their children is often rooted in a belief that families, communities, and children are deficient in the qualities, traits, and skills needed to educate. Schools then attempt to "overcome" what they see as the deficits of students by developing programs to compensate for what they believe to be lacking. These programs are often based in a skills approach which aims to "break down" learning, while overlooking the capacities, experiences, and culture that students and their families offer schools.

One community which has been profoundly affected by the deficit model is the Deaf community. Deafness is defined as the lack of hearing and, sometimes, speech and is studied in departments of "speech pathology and communication disorders".

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[1]The" Chicagoland Deaf Parent-to-Parent" project is funded through a grant from the United Way and offered through Jewish Family & Community Service of the Jewish Federation/Jewish United Fund of Chicago, and the Mendac Program Mt.Sinai Hospital.

Carver (1990) describes the problem more fully:

> *The deficit model would have us believe that the problem lies within the deaf individual. The reality is that the problem lies within the environment by its failure to provide readily accessible communication and linguistic tools that can be quickly and easily used by the deaf individual. Traditional intervention and instructional strategies tend to utilize the deaf individual's weaknesses for his/her educational development; audition/speech and the spoken language of the hearing society...In short the deficit model rather than making available as much information as possible in the most accessible way to the deaf child, withholds and limits it, thereby stunting his/her cognitive ability which is crucial to language and literacy development.*

More recently, in the wake of the civil rights movements of the 1960's, activists in the Deaf community have begun to describe the perspectives, knowledge, and *strengths* of the Deaf as a culture. With the realization that the signed languages used by deaf communities are linguistically valid language schools are beginning to consider the possibilities of using the Deaf experience and perspective in teaching and learning.

Culturally Responsive Education

Educators in recent decades have described the difficulties when children and the people from whom they are receiving their education are from differing cultural, language, and experiential backgrounds. If we believe that knowledge of a child's cultural group--its language, norms, values, and ways of doing things--is helpful in educating the child, then we know we must find a way to learn about their culture. One means which has been suggested for bridging the gaps which often exist is to develop partnerships with parents who can act as cultural translators (Delpit, 1995) and links to the cultural knowledge of the community (Cummins, 1989; Degado-Gaitan, 1990; Hulsebosch, 1996). The problem of developing culturally responsive teaching is made more complicated when neither the teachers nor the parents are members of the same cultural community as the child, as is the case with deaf children.

Ninety percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents, most of whom have had little or no experience with the norms, values or language of the Deaf community (Schein & Delk, 1974). Thus, the Deaf are one of the few minority groups where children typically do not share in their own parents (Deaf) culture, and later join a community that has values that their parents often do not understand and where membership is denied to the Hearing parents

Raising Deaf Children[2]
"My daughter is always asking Why ? Why ? It's exhausting!"
(Hearing parent of a six year old daughter/workshop participant)

Deaf of hearing:

Raising a deaf child can be very confusing and sometimes rather scary. They look just like other children. They ride bikes like the wind, run wildly into the street, climb to a treetop, go food shopping , swim in the lake, and eat lunch at MacDonalds. They do almost everything a hearing child does. They just don't understand the restrictions parents need to put on some of these activities. They want to know why can't you run in the street , why can't you climb a tree too high, why can't you swim out too far , why can't you have ice-cream at MacDonalds, and why shouldn't you stand in the. back of the cart at the food store. Often to a deaf child every thing is just "No! Don't do that! Stop!"
They can also participate in most of the activities with their hearing siblings: put their coat on to play in the snow; get in the car to go to the zoo; leave daycare on a fieldtrip; travel to Grandma's for the holidays. They can do it all, they just don't know why they're doing it. They wonder is this something fun I'll like to do or are we going to the doctor for a shot? And most hearing parents (at least in the beginning) don't have a way to communicate those everyday things. Over time many children begin to resist being moved

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[2]Typically when the literature refers to deaf children they either explicitly or implicitly are discussing the 90% who are being raised by hearing parents.

around without any sense of control over their environment and the power struggles begin.

Unfortunately as mutual frustration increases it be comes a barrier to language acquisition and parental attachment. Parent's Sign Language or the child's comprehension of spoken language can not be developed quickly enough to accommodate the physical/emotional growth of the deaf child. As children begin to move out into the world the lack of positive interactions a ways to communicate becomes much more problematic for families. This creates more pressure for the parents to try to learn more signs, or to increase practice of speech or aural training.

Parents of deaf children are encouraged to send their children to school at a young age for early intervention programs. There the focus is on language development and remediation. Little attention is paid to the families' emotional state or to the day to day interactions that serve to help or hinder the child parent relationships. Schools seldom have the time or the expertise to help parents deal with the frustration that occurs between parent and child in the home. Schools often do not encounter these problems to the extent that the parents experience them and thus do not understand the parents frustration. The teachers have a means of communication with the children and so there is less miscommunication, as well classes are more structured and consistent than home life The educational focus is on language acquisition leading parents to feel that if they only learn signs or the children learn to speak then all their behavior/communication problems will end. Much effort is spent on parent and children learning vocabulary and little time is spent on discussion of non verbal reciprocal (more rewarding) communication.

Learning new communication systems /languages takes time. Thus, no matter how diligent the family is about language development activities they feel some failure in their ability to parent their deaf children, and this in turn influences the child's self perception. Ironically, though parents of deaf children are willing to participate in therapeutic or

educational activities for their children (to remediate their deficiencies), they tend not to see themselves as having any needs.

Deaf of deaf Deaf parents raising deaf children bring to child-rearing years of implicit as well as explicit experience, knowledge, and attitudes about what it means to be Deaf. Deaf parents intuitively think in visual ways, which is the best way to convey information to young deaf children who are just forming a language base. If hearing parents can begin to learn visual communication techniques it will lessen the frustration that occurs, due to a lack of a shared communication system, between parent and child which is so damaging to the parent child bonding .

Although Deaf parents are raised in a society which sees them as disabled and can seldom avoid the attitudes of deficiency, they are also know what they, and their peers, have been capable of and, thus, are much more aware of their deaf children's potential. "Deaf children of deaf parents tend to be more self-assured, better educated, more literate, and better equipped to deal with life in a hearing world, without requiring extensive intervention from professionals. As a result, deaf of deaf tend to function better than deaf children who are raised in hearing families. Most go on to higher education, become employed and successful at their vocations" (Carver,1993;.Padden, 1990; Sisco and Anderson, 1980). For deaf parents, their deaf children are 'normal' and they look forward to sharing their life experiences via their common language.

Deaf parents as consultants

Deaf parents who have raised successful deaf children can provide valuable insights into the strengths and needs of deaf children. Yet, they have seldom been sought out for their expertise. One reason is that parents, particularly parents of disenfranchised groups (such as low-income, language diverse, or African-American) who are seen as troubled and troubling are seldom sought out as resources on their children (Auerbach, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Delpit, 1995). In addition, hearing parents and teachers of the deaf

may not have the skill in native Deaf language (American Sign Language or ASL) to communicate with deaf adults.

Even where deaf parents have been sought out in an effort to learn "deaf ways", such information has often been gathered through carefully controlled studies (Preisler, 1990). Seldom have professionals simply talked to deaf parents to learn their indigenous ways, or used them as resources in understanding deaf children.

This paper describes insights gained from a project which taps into the understandings of deaf parents who have raised deaf children on the natural learning styles of deaf children. Through a series of workshops which take place in schools and community centers, and through the pairing of a hearing parent with a deaf parent mentor, deaf parents act as resources and mentors to hearing parents who are raising deaf children, as well as to their schools (see Table 1 for a description of Project components).

The Deaf Parent to Parent Project

The Deaf Parent to Parent Project began from a desire to tap into the resources of the local Deaf community in the interest of supporting the knowledge, skills and networks of hearing parents raising deaf children. Project staff[3] initially went to the literature on raising deaf children to gain a better understanding of issues relevant for parents raising deaf children. Six Deaf[4] parents of deaf children met for 6 weeks in a focus group to brainstorm what knowledge, strategies, and skills they knew from their own parenting experiences. When their discussions mirrored current research on best practice for deaf children, that research was provided to them to help validate the significance of their

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[3] Project staff consist of Lynda Myers, a Deaf social worker from Jewish Family and Community Services, and Chris Mayworm, a Hearing child development specialist from the MENDAC (deaf mental health) program. Both project staff are also mothers, Lynda of a Deaf daughter and Chris of hearing children.

[4]Deaf (with a capital letter) is used to denote people who have a hearing loss and identify as part of Deaf culture, while deaf is used with people who have a severe to profound hearing loss.

experiential and intuitive responses. The hope was to extend their intuitive responses through validation in to a sense of empowerment and mastery. The ultimate goal of the series of focus groups was to identify techniques and concepts to be used in hands-on workshops to educate hearing parents on deaf children's learn strengths and needs. These initial participants also formed the core of the project's workshop facilitators.

The project staff then gathered a few additional deaf parents and some of the original focus group parents for 5 volunteer development/training sessions (12.5 hours total). The training served to continue the work of the focus group: to review research on deafness, communication methods, theories on teaching reading, and facilitation skills in order to prepare the team to lead the workshops.

Sessions focused on the perspectives of hearing parents who find out they have deaf children and the process of mourning that hearing parents go through when children are identified as deaf. One Deaf mother, Barbara, spoke of her recollections of her parents and their struggles with her as a child: "they were so overwhelmed they didn't know what to do with me." Another mother, Donna, shared her parallel process:

> *I remember how I felt when I had my first hearing child . I was surprised. Since I am many generations of deaf. My first born was deaf and I had expected that. I have all deaf brothers. All of a sudden I wondered how will I know what to do with hearing baby. I have no speech how will I communicate with her ? They [hearing parents] are like me, they don't know what to do...My daughters are fine they sign and talk very well now, I didn't need to worry.*

Deaf parents also discussed their own losses and encouraged each other to be sensitive to the emotional issues with which hearing parents are dealing. The final session was used to finalize the curriculum for the series of four hearing parent workshops .The deaf team created hands-on workshop activities that demonstrate and require use of "Deaf" techniques that can be used at home: holding the child's attention during reading; using facial expression; rule setting behaviorally. A key concept underlying much of what we

planned was the idea of "thinking visually", a perspective underlying much of Deaf culture.

The framework for the teaching style to be used for the workshops was established in the following conversation.

> *Lynda said: "What we have to remember when we are with hearing parents is that they are trying hard and don't know what the best thing is to do for their deaf children. Brian: "Yes we are to help them and not to make them feel more stupid or they will go away." In discussing the approach Cathy commented...hearing parents could learn better from observing us deaf parents than from reading books or going to all those lectures." Donna: "Right children learn best from seeing language used not lecturing or reading the books." Cathy: "so we should do the same with the parents; show them how to communicate with the children and force them to use their gestures to communicate with us". Lynda: "Right we don't teach, we let them observe us and model the best ways to communicate with the children."*

Conversation in the second meeting focused on how we could improve the non verbal communication in hearing families with deaf children. We felt that usually the deaf child's mothers are most involved so they learn to communicate with the deaf child. We noticed though that the rest of the family often can't communicate well with the child. Discussion moved to how could we help increase the enjoyment of non verbal communication and reduce the frustration of other family members with learning a new language (ASL) .

> *Donna: "Parents go to these sign classes at like Harper [Community College with an interpreter training program] and learn the names of the states and grownup things like that . Their children won't need to know that for a long time Then they go home and try to teach the child like they learned in school.That would bore me ! Lynda: " So how do we help reinforce use of the different feeling expressions?" Brian: "Maybe make a game out of them? Like charades with cards and people have to act out expressions? " Donna: "Oh, I know a game that children love to play. You make signs like flying and the children copy what you do. They love that any age ". Chris agreed and said "then we can ask the parents to copy the children whatever they are doing just copy it." She said " It is non verbal and helps the child feel secure and shows that parents have empathy for the child" Chris said that children feel parents approve of them when they see them following their actions. It makes them feel safe and happy, feel attached and*

> *that the parents are attuned to them and their feelings. That is a first step to a good relationship."*

Visual attention getting and keeping is an area that deaf people understand intuitively but where hearing parents struggle. Since parents need to be able to catch and keep their child's attention in order to communicate with them it is a vital skill.

> *Lynda: "Hearing parents don't know how to think visually nor how to catch deaf person's attention, since many of the things we do are strange to them and they would never think of it on their own." Barbara: "You are right and they don't like some of the things we do. For example at work I can't find a deaf person, I look around and can't see them so I decided to flash the lights. I know they will know I'm looking for them and come to me. My boss came and scolded me for that . It's not a hearing thing to do and I guess it bothered the hearing people on the floor.*

Lynda then asked the group, "How do we get our deaf children's attention?" Suggestions of group members included: "stamp on the floor or the table to vibrate and children will look up"; "flash the lights on and off wave in line of vision"; "tap on arm"; "throw something in line of vision--but not at them because they will start throwing things back at you!." "More? Wait for them to look up and then use facial expression to give information"; "play along with them or show them some concepts related to what they are interested in like colors same as what they are looking at or dolls different kinds, etc., make use of what they are interested in to elaborate on a theme"; "use physical contact to show you like what they are doing or to copy what they are playing with"; "use of eye line of sight: use of eyes to direct attention of child"; "you have to force them to respond rather than giving them what they want without waiting for communication to happen"

In the fourth meeting the mothers demonstrated how they would use books with deaf children. We looked at a story about a boy and his dog while Barbara signed the story as if we were a group of children: Boy is mad at the dog. Oh !! Look! Mom is mad at the dog. Shake fingers at the picture of the dog eating a shoe, sign "bad dog!". We discussed

what parents could do if they have little or no signs and the children may have no signs. Barbara: Well then copy what is happening in the book. If boy is pouring water then mom mimes turning over the bucket. If the dog is ashamed, sad, then mom show the same face to child. Point to picture show sad face to child." Donna: "Yeah, and mom can also mime what's happening in the picture use hands to copy the motions in the photo to accent the activity happening. For example, dog pulling on leash--mom can mime 'pull'; show the struggle with her hands. Susan continues: "If parents have more vocabulary they can add on to the story 's pictures: 'See dog, soft, furry, brown, have eyes brown.' Use book to make comparisons. Like dog have eyes: point to eye of dog; point to child eye; point to mom eye; show all have same. Exaggerate the features of the story: dog have nose long; mom have nose small; baby have bite nose.

Our last meeting was called "helpful hints for behavior". We began by discussing how hearing teachers and parents of deaf children often call deaf children stubborn and wondered if that was true or a myth. Donna noted that her deaf daughter is always more curious and demanding about knowing what's going on around her than her hearing children. "She is stubborn about repetitiously asking for information like 'who's at the door or on the street', and I don't even know myself and so will have to stop what I'm doing to go look and she won't let up about it." Lynda, "Good point I wonder if it's different because she's deaf and is trying hard to understand how the world works and all she has is her eyes. Her sisters have TV and radio and friends to talk about things with and maybe they don't need more stimulation." Donna echoed this, "They [my hearing children] are happy to sit and look at TV. Maybe my deaf daughter wants more. Maybe TV is not enough for her. Maybe its too hard to get information from TV. Everyday life is more interesting and she has me who can explain things to her so she can understand her world better"

We talked about a concern of all parents, but especially parents of deaf children: How do we keep kids from running off or going in street? Sarah commented that she thought

the street signs saying "Deaf Children Playing" were silly. "You just teach deaf children not to run into the street." Limit setting and consistency were important ideas, and parents acted out how they'd set the limits, and reinforce them, again and again, until the child knew the parent was serious. They agreed that facial expressions and body language were an important part of letting the child know this was serious. They also talked about language differences that confuse children:

> *Chris: "No ice cream' is confusing for child. "no, none, nothing." Hearing parents forget to distinguish between them and use one sign for all. If they mean 'have none', then show 'all gone, empty freezer, see. Sorry none.' That's different than signing 'no ice cream' meaning 'You can't have any.'*

Barbara agreed saying, "We have to help them learn how to demonstrate using gestures. We have to show them how to do that."

Bob raised the idea of using photos to show the children where they are going. "Maybe we could start out the first workshop taking a photo of the group and them parents can use that when it is time for the next weeks workshop. Then we can explain how to use photos and calendars to help children understand every day life more by creating some predictability for them."

Parent-to-Parent Workshops

The four session workshops, as devised by the Deaf parent team, will be family-focused and, hopefully, a pleasure for all. This program will use local community sites in Chicago and public schools for its workshops so as to be accessible to the various communities where deaf children may live. This also addresses the ability of our services to adapt to the varying needs of the communities with which families may be connected . The project will also use established Deaf community and school networks to recruit and provide locations for parents to attend the four weekly workshops. By being in the community we will make our resources available to the schools (teachers ,social workers, parents,) and community groups that we visit in both formal and informal ways. By using

deaf community locations we are exposing parents to Deaf resources and helping hearing parents to feel more comfortable in the deaf community. Parents will then know someone who attends the deaf temple or church ,or might run into one of the team members, at a deaf club holiday party and be introduced around thus begin to feel more comfortable in the community that their child is likely to join.

But through their contact with hearing, parents deaf parents serve several other important functions. They are role models, not only of varied forms of communication, but also of attitudes towards deafness and realistic expectations, for both parents and children. They are also educators of new behaviors, liaisons and guides to the deaf community, consultants for schools, and possible future friends and supports for hearing parents raising deaf children.

There is also a benefit for the deaf community, by training some of its members in child development and group process,. they will be able to carry that information back to the deaf community which is in dire need of new leadership, and provide access to basic parenting information. By helping the deaf team to articulate their knowledge they will also become aware of their own value providing them with an empowering experience.

We hope to enable hearing parents to reconnect with their parental abilities, to lessen the frustration in the home, to allow the child and family to connect and enjoy each other. We have not yet offered enough workshops to have a great deal of data, nor had time to analyze the videotapes and survey information we have. What we do know is that the hearing (as well as the deaf) parents return week after week, often bringing with them additional parents and more of their family.

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Table 1

Parent- to-Parent Project
Components

I. Focus Groups with Deaf Parents — 6 sessions

--articulate experiential knowledge
--connect experiential to research and theoretical knowledge

II. Parent Facilitation Training — 5 sessions

--discuss knowledge, skills and strategies from focus groups
--understand hearing parents' perspectives and experiences
--plan curriculum for Project Workshops
    -content
    -hands-on teaching

III. Parent-to-Parent Workshops — 4 sessions

--offered at schools or community organizations
--informal settings
--family-focused (parents with children)

IV. Follow-up
--Deaf parent mentor for each Hearing parent
--annual gathering of graduates

Myers, L. (1997) Communicating Across Cultures: The Deaf Parent to Hearing Parent Project; AERA Annual Meeting. The "Parent-to-Parent" project is funded through a grant from the United Way and offered through Jewish Family and Community Services of the Jewish Federation in Chicago.

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Lutheran Deaf Ministry and HANDS Org. Hosts
Chicagoland Deaf Parent to Parent Project*

WORKSHOP THREE: MARCH 22, 1997
AGENDA

1. Check-in:
   How are things going at home? Any questions or comments to share?

2. Warm-up exercise:

3. Reading:
   * What do you already do at home?
   * What kind of books are best?
   * Concrete (real experience) <----------> abstract
   * Make your own book

4. **GETTING AND MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S VISUAL ATTENTION**
   * Ways to get your child's attention - what do you do?
   * What to do when they won't look at you

5. **HOW TO KEEP THEIR ATTENTION :**

   A. SEMANTIC CONTINGENCY "Don't keep changing the subject"

   B. SIGN PLACEMENT - Follow the child's visual line; sign on the book, etc.

   C. TEXT PAIRED WITH SIGNED DEMONSTRATION - Clarifying the text or picture by demonstrating the action pictured or represented in the text.

   D. REAL WORLD CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEXT AND THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE - Sign an example of an event or experience in the child's life which relates to the story text.

   E. PHYSICAL DEMONSTRATION OF CHARACTER CHANGES - Use of facial expressions and body postue to signal different characters in the book.

   PRACTICE

6. **WRITE DOWN THREE CHALLENGES IN BEHAVIO MANAGEMENT.**
7. **WRAP-UP**

**affiliate agency of the Jewish Federation supported by the Jewish United Fund.1997

*Funded by the United Way of Chicago